

Michigan
Department
of Human
Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

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House Approps approves omnibus budget

Gongwer News Service

May 23, 2006

The House budget is \$26.7 billion, \$7.2 billion in general funds, under an omnibus budget approved by the House Appropriations Committee on Tuesday. Republicans supported passage of the bill to the full chamber, while Democrats on the panel abstained from voting with the exception of three members.

The omnibus bill (HB 5795) is the same as budget bills passed out of the Appropriations subcommittee level (including all state agencies and the Michigan Strategic Fund), except for some changes to budgets for the departments of Community Health, **Human Services**, Corrections, Military and Veterans Affairs, State Police and Transportation.

HUMAN SERVICES: The department budget is \$4.4 billion (\$1.1 billion in general funds), which is \$45 million below the governor's budget and is \$1.7 million less than current fiscal year appropriations.

The committee adopted an additional \$78,000 in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds for a crisis intervention center in Pontiac, which had been eliminated in the governor's recommendation. The bill also includes boilerplate language that a more uniform distribution of food stamps is considered by December 1 and that a report to the Legislature is made by that time.

The bill provides for a 48-month lifetime limit on cash assistance and has sanctions for the first two violations of work requirements equal to 90 days but sets the third violation penalty at 12 months, instead of the 24 months that the House approved in a budget supplemental for the current fiscal year last week.

Rep. Chris Kolb (D-Ann Arbor) proposed an amendment that would transform the DHS budget back to the governor's recommendation, with the caveat of a 90-90-180 day sanction, as well as increase daycare reimbursement rates by 3.5 percent. Mr. Kolb said he did not expect those changes to be adopted, but he wanted to lay the groundwork for target talks. The amendment failed on party-line votes.

And Rep. George Cushingberry (D-Detroit) offered an amendment to raise the daycare rates, which have not increased for 13 years. Rep. Jerry Kooiman (R-Grand Rapids) said the proposal would cost \$118 million and that he did not know where lawmakers would get the money. The amendment also failed by party.

Mr. Cushingberry also offered an amendment requiring more coordination to leverage federal funding toward transportation of low-income residents. Rep. Shelley Taub (R-Bloomfield Hills) said the Transportation budget provides \$17 million toward that purpose, along with money provided by local units of government. The proposed amendment also failed by party.

Senate Appropriations move budget bills

Gongwer News Service

May 23, 2006

While the House Appropriations Committee handled the bulk of the 2006-07 budget in just one bill, the Senate Appropriations Committee handled nine bills that sent the rest of the 2006-07 budget to the full chamber for consideration.

The Senate had already passed half of the proposed budget over to the House more than one month ago, so the action Tuesday puts it at a par with the other chamber.

According to Senate officials, lunch has been ordered for the chamber for Wednesday's session as they anticipate grinding through the bills and sending them to the north side of the Capitol.

And while the committee worked on budgets that included billions in spending, it was one of the smallest budgets that generated some of the most disagreement in the committee as cuts to the Department of History, Arts and Libraries for arts grants and libraries were challenged.

The nearly four-hour meeting (when a one-hour Republican caucus is included) was generally good-natured, though, as the panel scrambled to get the bills out. In fact, the committee gave the chair, Sen. Shirley Johnson (R-Troy), a standing ovation, as the meeting may be one of her last where she shepherds so many budget bills through at one time. Ms. Johnson is term-limited this year.

HUMAN SERVICES (SB 1090■): The Department of Human Services would be allocated \$4.471 billion, \$1.2 billion in general funds. The total budget would be about 1 percent larger than the current year.

Unlike the efforts in the House to enact major changes to the state's welfare requirements, the Senate bill makes little change to the overall policies to the state's welfare programs.

In fact, where House members had made particular challenges to the administration's efforts to boost the number of welfare recipients working through the Jobs, Education and Training program – the federal government requires that all states show that 50 percent of their welfare recipients are working and thus far the state shows that 22 percent are – Senate members agreed that the JET program should be the vehicle to boost that job participation.

Subcommittee chair Sen. Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood) said where Ms. Granholm called for an additional 51 child protective services workers – an issues that came into sharper focus earlier this year with the murder of Ricky Holland, allegedly by his foster parents – the subcommittee has called for 56 more child protective services workers. The budget will also add another 20 workers to inspect child and adult care centers.

An effort by Sen. Deborah Cherry (D-Burton) to boost funding for childcare for individuals working second and third shifts was defeated, though Mr. Hardiman said he would look at the issue. Ms. Cherry said if the state does not include that funding then it creates an untenable position for people trying to get off welfare. The state says those individuals must work, but many of the jobs they can get are for second and third shifts – that go through the night. Childcare must be made available for those workers at those times, or they cannot find work, she said.

Welfare, education key to budget debate

House, Senate may pass spending bills as early as today

By Tim Martin

Associated Press

Published May 24, 2006

From the Lansing State Journal

Welfare programs and funding for higher education are two areas of disagreement between Republicans and Democrats as the Legislature prepares for votes on the next state budget.

The House and Senate, both with Republican majorities, plan key floor votes on their proposals as early as today. The two chambers will each pass their own versions of a budget bill for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. Differences will have to be ironed out between the two chambers and with Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

State revenues are not expected to be much higher than they have been this budget year, so lawmakers say they will have tough choices to make in funding programs and services.

The state House plan would give public K-12 schools a minimum of \$230 more per student, which is more than proposed by either the state Senate or Granholm. The House plan would raise the minimum foundation allowance to \$7,105 per pupil.

Lower-funded districts would get an additional \$35 per student. Early education programs and middle school math programs also would get a boost.

"We want to help kids succeed in school, and we've made it a major priority," said Rep. Scott Hummel, a DeWitt Republican and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

Most of Michigan's public universities would get funding increases in the House, Senate and Granholm plans.

But Wayne State would lose 1.9 percent of its state funding under the House proposal, which has angered Detroit area Democrats.

The House has a welfare plan that would restrict benefits for able-bodied adults to two consecutive years and four years over their lifetime.

People would have to show proof they are legally living in the U.S. to get benefits and individuals convicted of certain felonies would not be eligible for benefits.

Recipients would lose some of their benefits if they don't fulfill work or training requirements.

Supporters of the plan also said it provides more support, education and job training to help welfare recipients become self-sufficient.

Johnson Gets Standing O In Approps Finale

MIRS, Tuesday, May 22, 2006

In the midst of a long afternoon of pushing 10 budgets onto the Senate floor, the Senate Appropriations Committee gave its chair, Sen. Shirley **JOHNSON** (R-Troy) a standing ovation in recognition of her 26 years of service in the Legislature and the appropriations process.

Johnson is term-limited after this year and today marked her final major Appropriations Committee meeting.

"You've been wonderful to work with," said Sen. Mike **GOSCHKA** (R-Brant). "The days of Shirley Johnson will not be forgotten."

That was the highlight of an afternoon-long meeting in which the Senate committee shifted all of its "second house" budget bills for expected debate on the Senate floor tomorrow. The Senate Appropriations Committee today moved budgets for the departments of Transportation; Agriculture; State Police, Military and Veterans Affairs; History, Arts and Libraries; Human Services and Labor and Economic Growth. The Judiciary and General Government budgets also moved.

DLEG Budget Spared 1.3% Cut

A Senate panel this morning reported out a Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) budget bill that was spared the 1.3 percent General Fund (GF) fund cut other department budgets were hit with in the Senate after the panel's chair found other items in the budget to sacrifice.

The Senate DLEG Appropriations Subcommittee this morning reported **SB 1092** by cutting economic development job training grants in the Strategic Fund, which is a separate budget from DLEG.

"Because I have both budgets, I took it all out of one pot and in order to make them [Strategic Fund] whole, I shifted some federal dollars from the DLEG budget over to the Strategic Fund budget," said Chair Sen. Valde **GARCIA** (R-Howell). "The way we did is we took that cut out of the economic development job training dollars in the Strategic Fund."

In total, the budget sets aside \$1.2 billion for DLEG, roughly \$459,600 more than Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM**'s recommendation. The bill comes in \$1.3 million over the governor's recommended \$48.8 million spending limit.

Highlights of the budget include:

- The Senate added \$1.3 million GF to fund the administrative expenses of the new Bureau of Fire Services. A fund shift of \$906,000 from the Construction Code Fund to the General Fund was made to cover overhead costs.
- The Senate did not include some \$23 million from increased liquor license fees that the governor called for
- The Senate added language allocating \$6 million of Workforce Investment Act funds to the

Michigan Works! Agencies for incumbent worker training. The first \$3 million would be distributed through the existing formula and the remaining \$3 million would be used in coordination with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) to support Economic Development Job Training Grants.

Transportation Budget

The full Senate Appropriations Committee advanced SB 1097 without change to the subcommittee version (See "Transportation Budget Races Through Subcommittee," 05/16/06).

Sen. Mike **PRUSI** (D-Ispheming) did make a run at restoring funding for both the Comprehensive Transportation Fund and planning personnel for mass transit, but to no avail.

Agriculture Budget

With SB 1080, the committee gave its blessing to a \$113 million Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget for the Department of Agriculture (See "Senate Strikes Middle Ground On Ag Budget," 05/18/06).

Before the bill was passed however, Sen. Jim **BARCIA** (D-Bay City) lamented over the fact that for the last eight years, the state's General Fund support for the budget has been halved from \$60 million to \$30 million.

The committee did restore a \$75,000 cut that was made in the conservation district line in a Sen. Ron **JELINEK** (R-Three Oaks) amendment that called for the Agriculture Commission to develop rate of return (i.e. what the state gets back in economic return per buck invested in agricultural programs.)

Judiciary Budget

SB 1091, FY 2007 funding for the state's court system went without amendment today to the Senate floor (See "Senate Continues Its Cutting Ways With Judiciary/HAL," 05/16/06).

Veteran's Service Organization Gets Smidgeon More

The state's 11 Veteran's Service Organizations will be splitting a \$117,000 funding increase that was approved today by the full Senate Appropriations Committee when it took up SB 1093, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (MVA) budget for FY 2007.

The panel also reported without major change SB 1096, FY 2007 funding for the Department of State Police (See "CREC Spares State Police, Veterans' Budgets," 05/18/06).

The only modification made to the State Police budget was a Prusi amendment that stipulates that the Department could use unexpended resources to provide a pension boost to a number of retired officers who were never compensated for their overtime duties.

History, Arts & Libraries

It was Sen. Hansen **CLARKE** (D-Detroit) who today made the most impassioned plea over a budget cut.

Clarke attempted to convince his colleagues to restore a combined \$175,000 in funding for the state's Arts and Cultural Grants and the State Aid to Libraries line by taking the funding from the film office in SB 1089 (See "Senate Continues Its Cutting Ways With Judiciary/HAL," 05/16/06). Clarke argued that since the Film Office received \$2 million from the 21st Century Jobs Fund, its General Fund appropriations could go somewhere else.

"Let's not try to make excuses not to fund our arts and libraries," said Clarke.

Garcia pointed out that he believed it was the intent of some members that the \$2 million be spent in addition to what is already being invested in film promotion. Despite arguing that the \$175,000 would meet the letter of the law as far as film promotion, the panel rejected Clarke's pleas.

Prusi did succeed in getting the GOP majority to restore a \$20,000 cut to the state's book distribution centers.

Department of Human Services

The full Appropriations Committee today gave it's blessing to SB 1090, FY 2007 funding for the Department of Human Services. The bill saw only modest changes from the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee version (See "48-Month Limit Removed From DHS Budget," 05/18/06).

One change that did get approved was the creation of a \$100 point of difference with the House in funding for Runaway Youth Programs. Those programs hadn't seen a funding increase since 1999.

Sen. Deb **CHERRY** (D-Burton) got some sympathy, but not enough support to get her amendment adopted that would waive an hour-of-operations cap for day care centers that provide day care for second-and third-shift workers.

"We're putting people in a horrible box," Cherry explained. "You want them to work, but you don't provide day care."

General Government Budget

SB 1087 saw only minor changes in the full committee (See "Senate Cuts 1.3% From General Government Budget," 05/16/06).

Today, Sen. Tom **GEORGE** (R-Texas Twp.) was successful in getting an amendment that would allow the Department of History, Arts and Libraries to charge consulting fees to the Department of Treasury for assistance given to those applying for Historical Preservation Tax Credits. Apparently, the consulting would amount to about \$150,000 or 1.5 full time positions.

Sen. Cameron **BROWN** (R-Fawn River Twp.) succeeded in getting \$300,000 added to the budget for promotion of the Michigan International Speedway (\$200,000) and the Detroit Zoo (\$100,000).

Omnibus Leaves The Station

MIRS, Tuesday, May 23, 2006

The House Republicans' 600-page omnibus budget left the station this morning, but if the spending plan for Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 is going to carry any Democratic supporters, it'll need to pick them up at some other stops in the road.

By and large, what the House Appropriations Committee moved along to the House floor today was exactly what the individual department subcommittees passed out three weeks ago.

But Democrats didn't appreciate Republican leadership mashing their admittedly minor changes into the omnibus FY 2007 appropriations bill, HB 5795, without offering amendments. They also objected to not being allowed any substantive debates in public on any of the budget items in question, leaving them feeling like they, literally, had missed the bus.

"We're heading in the right direction, but we're not there, yet," said Rep. Rich **BROWN** (D-Bessemer). "We've given ourselves these artificial timetables that restrict what we can do ... they need to be adjusted."

Republicans countered by pointing out that if the Democrats had felt passionately enough about any of the items in the budget, they could have worked with the respective subcommittee chair sometime in the past three weeks as opposed to waiting until the last minute to pop out some new suggestions.

Rep. Chris **KOLB**'s (D-Ann Arbor) new plan to reform the state's welfare system without including a 48-month lifetime limit on healthy adults receiving public assistance was rolled over because, among other things, Republicans argued they hadn't been given enough time to review the proposal.

The House Democrats' other suggested changes to the state's spending, several of which were shot down in subcommittee, all met the same fate. Even when a Democratic member offered up an amendment the Republican subcommittee chair saw had some promise, it got ran over by an omnibus that is hurling toward a passage this week in the full House.

Rep. George **CUSHINGBERRY** (D-Detroit) noted that the House's spending plan would look much better if the committee was committed to spending a few days to "massage" the budget into something everybody could support. Instead, Cushingberry was asked originally to keep his questions on "The Bus" on the few changes the House Republicans made to it. Any other questions he had could be taken care of by talking to the subcommittee chair. That went over poorly with the veteran lawmakers.

"That's a ludicrous analysis to say I should have questions answered in the dark," Cushingberry said. "I want these questions answered in public."

House Appropriations Chairman Scott **HUMMEL** (R-DeWitt) then changed his mind and let Cushingberry ask away.

In the end, the main issues the Democrats have with the bus' contents — the welfare reforms, a capped revenue sharing increase for Detroit, doubling the emergency room co-pay for Medicaid

recipients — will be settled behind closed doors as part of the target discussions when leadership from the two chambers bargain with the administration in the "target" negotiations.

From a tactical standpoint, though, if Republicans bend to the Democrats on a few of minority party issues now, it weakens their position going into the late spring/early summer target negotiations.

Asked to comment on this perception at a press conference this afternoon, Hummel said, "When you stake out a certain position and you can stick with that plan, it does strengthen the hand of the Speaker and my hand going into negotiations."

However, Hummel was quick to add that the budget that is coming up for a vote on the House floor this week is not inflexible and estimated that some Democrats will end up voting for the bill on the floor.

In committee today none of the Democratic members supported the bill. Cushingberry, Rep. Martha **CHEEKS** (D-Detroit) and Rep. Morris **HOOD** III (D-Detroit) voted against the omnibus while the other members passed on the vote.

Of the changes made to the omnibus bill, the most significant was a provision inserted into the Department of Human Services (DHS) section that asked the department to work out a plan to spread out the distribution of food stamps over a greater period of time. Currently, food stamps are given out over a nine-day window, which is crushing some small urban grocery stores with business during those nine days.

The idea is that by spreading out the distribution over the entire month, grocers could better stabilize their stock and their employee's hours.

The omnibus also changed the funding source of a few items from the once-perceived-flush School Aid Fund (SAF) to the healthier-than-expected General Fund (GF).

At this afternoon's press conference, House Republicans presented their budget package to the media with the main message points being that the omni bus and the education budget bills "stopped the Granholm tax increases on people and job providers, gave more funding to help our kids learn in school, ended lifetime welfare benefits for able-bodied recipients and supported local fire and police."

Hummel said the House budget makes the state live within its means at a time of economic uncertainty.

"We're proud of what we put out there and look forward to the budget process as it continues," he said.

Later in the day, the Democrats three Upper Peninsula House members said they would introduce an amendment to restore the governor's 2 percent funding increase to Northern Michigan University (NMU), whose state funding for FY 2007 is more or less held flat under the House proposal.

Metro Detroit

If convicted of murder, teen may get adult prison

May 24, 2006

By Jack Kresnak

Detroit Free Press

A 15-year-old Detroit boy being held in the shooting death of a homeless man on March 26 is being designated for adult treatment in juvenile court, which means he could be sentenced to adult prison if convicted, officials said Tuesday.

At a hearing in the juvenile division of Wayne County Family Court on Saturday, the boy and his mother had been told that he was being tried as a juvenile on a first-degree murder charge in the shooting death of Braymond Harris, 21.

But on Monday, the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office filed a notice in the court to designate the boy for adult treatment if convicted.

Under such designated cases, a juvenile is given the same legal procedures in juvenile court as defendants in adult criminal cases get. If the juvenile is convicted, the juvenile court judge then decides among three options: an adult prison sentence; strict juvenile treatment until age 21, or a blended sentence in which prison time is imposed if the juvenile does not cooperate in rehabilitation efforts.

The boy is scheduled for a preliminary examination Friday before Wayne County Family Court Judge Virgil Smith.

Metro Detroit

Cops knew of troubled Oxford teen

Bombs, blueprints found, but friends say he isn't violent

May 24, 2006

BY KATHLEEN GRAY and LORI HIGGINS

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

Oxford police had been watching Joel Thomas, the 16-year-old charged with making bombs, since April when they say he broke into a library. Prosecutors want him charged as an adult after they found several bombs and school blueprints in the basement of his family home.

What they found

- Authorities confiscated several weapons from Joel Thomas, the 16-year-old Oxford High School student accused of stockpiling a cache of explosive devices, including:
- 16 homemade bombs wrapped in black electrical tape with wicks protruding from one end.
- Two homemade bombs consisting of shotgun shells wrapped in black electrical tape.
- A container of paste that law enforcement officials described as a napalm-like substance.
- A computer and zip drive.
- Blueprints and keys to various Oxford schools buildings.

It didn't take long for police to zero in on Joel Thomas.

Over a three-week span, break-ins were reported at three buildings within blocks of the 16-year-old's home on Pontiac Street in Oxford. One building had been torched. A neighbor also told police that Joel had been shooting arrows into her yard.

"I had an inclination about this young man," said Oxford Village Police Chief Michael Neymanowski.

But nothing prepared law enforcement officials for the cache of explosives they found, along with blueprints of Oxford High School and keys to several Oxford schools, in the teen's basement.

There were 16 homemade explosive devices wrapped in black electrical tape with wicks coming from one end and two other devices, which used shotgun shells wrapped in tape and also had wicks. In a shed in the yard, there was a napalm-like paste.

"We've had situations where we've recovered weapons by or in a school and threats have been made," said Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard. "But all the different components of this case were painting a very dark picture." That's why prosecutors filed a request Tuesday to charge Joel as an adult.

Joel was arrested Friday and charged Saturday as a juvenile with arson and three counts of breaking and entering. He's being held at Children's Village in Waterford.

Hearings on the charges and the prosecutors' request will be held next week, said Deborah Carley, chief deputy prosecutor.

The weapons were discovered after the Oakland County Sheriff's Office got a tip on Friday from Oxford school officials concerned about something on Joel's computer at school. The Michigan State Police confiscated the bombs and is testing the devices to determine exactly what the explosive material is. The Sheriff's Office is analyzing Joel's computer equipment for any clues as to where he got the explosives and what he planned to do with them.

"He's implying it was more of a mission for him, but he didn't intend to hurt anybody," said Bouchard. "But it seems terribly bizarre to go to all this trouble without some intent to do some harm."

Carley said there are no plans yet to charge Joel with a count of threatening an act of terrorism because they haven't uncovered anything that showed intent.

"The fact that he had the plans for the school gives us some pause as a possible indication of intent," she said. "But without more, we just don't know yet what he was planning."

Joel's crime spree allegedly began in April, said Neymanowski:

On April 21, Joel allegedly broke into the Oxford Township Public Library. A security camera was dismantled and taken along with a water meter from the outside of the building. Another 16-year-old Oxford Township resident also was arrested in connection with that break-in and is expected to be charged as a juvenile. Library officials estimate that \$1,500 in damage was done to the library.

On May 6, a school-district maintenance garage was broken into.

On May 9, one of Joel's neighbors complained that the teen had been shooting arrows into her yard.

On May 14, a storage building owned by the Oxford school district and about a half-block from Joel's house was broken into. Blueprints and keys for school buildings were taken and the building was set on fire, causing about \$250,000 in damage.

People who know Joel are perplexed by the allegations.

At Christ the King Church in Oxford where Joel and his parents, Janice and James Thomas, do volunteer work and worship, the Rev. Bob Holt said Joel had been a bit distant in the past year, but he attributed it to typical teenage withdrawal.

"But Joel has never had any background in anything like this. We're all kind of shocked," he said. "The Thomas family is a wonderful family and they're devastated by all of this."

A woman who answered the door at the Thomas family home and identified herself as Joel's aunt said the family did not want to talk to the media.

Friends Chelsea Shveida, 16, and Andrea Holden, 14, both of Oxford Township, said Joel was smart and inquisitive.

"He likes to figure things out. We don't think he would do anything," said Chelsea.

Added Andrea, "He's not the kind of person who would do that."

Some Oxford High students were nonchalant about the arrest.

Dan Arft, 16, a sophomore from Leonard, said he used to go to school in Jackson where he said bomb threats were frequent.

"Nothing ever happened," he said.

But Keshev Kumar said word of the arrest rattled him. Students and faculty were sent home Monday morning as authorities and five bomb-sniffing dogs searched the high school for explosives.

"It was pretty traumatic to me," said Keshev, a 15-year-old sophomore. "I was like, this kid could've blown me up."

The case brought up unpleasant memories for Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith, who prosecuted Andrew Osantowski for threatening an act of terrorism after a cache of weapons was found in his house in September 2004.

"The community was on pins and needles. They were clearly, extremely upset about this," he said. "To this day, if you mention Osantowski or a case similar, like this one in Oxford, it gets people's attention."

Contact **KATHLEEN GRAY** at 313-223-4407 or gray@freepress.com. Staff writers Amber Hunt and Jack Kresnak contributed to this report.

Teens give big check to improve youth jail

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

By Steve Gunn

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE

Smart, well-behaved teens don't always pause to consider the plight of less successful youngsters, particularly those on the wrong side of the law. But the 16 teens on the Youth Advisory Council of the Community Foundation for Muskegon County apparently are different. After searching for a worthy recipient of a youth-oriented grant, the kids on the council presented Muskegon County commissioners with a \$30,000 check Tuesday to help find a way to improve or replace the county's outdated, undersized juvenile detention facility.

The money will help pay a private firm that's developing a master plan for aging county facilities, including the county jail and the juvenile detention facility. The juvenile portion of the study is expected to cost around \$90,000, so the grant will cover about a third of that expense. In presenting the check, the teens on the council noted that their job is to identify and assist programs that benefit the youth of Muskegon County. In this case, they demonstrated that their concern extends to all youth, not just those who are already doing well.

"You don't know how they got in trouble," Sidnei McCarty, a senior at Muskegon High School, said about the young people at the detention facility. "You don't know what's going on in the homes."

"They're in the (facility) because they committed crimes, but there has to be a way to get them back on track," said Mitch Anderson, a senior at Montague High School and chairman of the advisory council.

The teens on the council carry quite a bit of clout. With a member from each public and private high school in the county, the council oversees an endowment of roughly \$1.6 million, and recommends ways to spend about 4 percent of that total every year.

The board of directors of the community foundation can veto any of the council's grant recommendations. But that has never happened in the advisory council's 16-year history, Anderson said.

The council has awarded roughly \$900,000 in grants since its inception in 1990, he said. The youngsters on the advisory council weren't immediately sold on the idea of helping juvenile offenders. As 18-year-old Ryan Cummins of Orchard View High School put it, "Some kids don't even understand there's a problem like this. I didn't even know there was a juvenile detention center."

It wasn't until the council toured the facility in February that its members started to consider the plight of their incarcerated peers. While they said they believe the facility staff does the best job it can with the resources available, they came away with some negative impressions. Council members said they don't think there's enough room to properly house the juvenile offenders. They also don't think the facility has enough educational programs or counseling services to positively impact kids.

More than anything, they think the facility and its programs should be designed to help troubled youngsters get a fresh start in the community. They said they hope their donation will help the county find a way to make that goal a reality.

"It's not a place I would want to stay," Anderson said. "We got in there and I thought it was like a jail, which ultimately it is. It should be a detention center that offers programs so kids can come out for the better, so they can turn away from crime and become regular citizens of the community."

Arnold Boezaart, vice president for grant programs at the community foundation, was with the students when they toured the detention facility. He said he heard many of them say they knew kids who had been incarcerated, but they never had a chance to really see what the experience is like.

"They were struck by the physical limitations, because every little part of life is so regimented," Boezaart said. "None of these kids had been in a place like that before. They looked around and it was like a jail."

Boezaart said he wasn't surprised by the students' positive response to their visit.

"That empathy (they displayed) is not something new," Boezaart said. "It's always there. These young people have a real positive impact on their community."

The students on the council obviously intend to remain involved in the juvenile detention issue, well beyond the presentation of the \$30,000 check.

One stipulation of the grant is that they have a seat at all future meetings where the juvenile detention facility is discussed.

"Our voices will be heard," Anderson said.

Man charged in girl's sex abuse

Suspect, a retired autoworker and onetime elder at church, accused of molesting young relative

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

BY AMALIE NASH

Ann Arbor News

A former elder at Community of Christ church in Ann Arbor was arraigned Tuesday on charges that he molested a young female relative for four years in his Ypsilanti Township home.

The nine felony charges against Russell Wilson, 68, accuse him of the repeated sexual abuse of a relative from the time she was 7 years old until she was 11. The girl is now 15 and lives in Superior Township.

Washtenaw County Sheriff's Cmdr. Dave Egeler said Wilson, who was involved with the church for more than 20 years, molested the girl in his home on Desoto Avenue. It was unclear what caused the abuse to end four years ago, Egeler said.

Wilson, a retired autoworker, was charged with three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, three counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct and three counts of assault with intent to commit penetration.

"We're investigating whether it's possible that there are other victims," Egeler said.

Wilson's attorney, Michael Vincent of Ypsilanti, said his client stood mute to the charges, and a not-guilty plea was entered on his behalf.

"These are very serious charges, and I have a substantial police report to read through to see what these charges are about," Vincent said.

Pastor Rick MacGregor of Community of Christ referred questions to the Community of Christ Southern Great Lakes International Mission in Lansing. Debora Crowley, the mission center president there, declined to discuss Wilson's current or former role with the church but said procedures are in place at the church to protect children, and the appropriate processes have been initiated.

"Community of Christ is saddened to learn of the alleged inappropriate behavior by one of its members," Crowley said.

Wilson's relatives did not speak to the media after the arraignment.

Egeler said he believed Wilson resigned from his post with the church, on West Jefferson Street in Ann Arbor, amid the investigation, but church officials would not confirm that. On the church Web site, Wilson is listed as an elder. No information was available Tuesday on how the allegations were reported to police this year. Wilson turned himself over to police Monday and remains jailed on \$250,000 bond. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for May 31.

The charges are punishable by up to life in prison.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6832.

Livingston detective nabs suspect in online sex sting

Lansing man charged with soliciting 15-year-old via Internet

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT

Ann Arbor News

Just a few weeks into his training as a computer crimes sleuth, a Livingston County Sheriff's detective has made his first arrest - a Lansing man police say was soliciting a 15-year-old girl over the Internet for sex.

Detective Matthew Shutes, a 14-year police veteran, started an 18-month tour with the Michigan State Police Internet Crimes Against Children task force and Computer Crimes Unit about six weeks ago, he said Tuesday. When he returns to the sheriff's department, he'll be the department's computer crimes investigator.

Livingston County Sheriff Robert Bezotte said Tuesday that he actually hopes to get Shutes back in less than 18 months, because the previous computer crime detective, Ed Moore, recently retired.

"Identity theft is something that we haven't even touched the surface of, but the most important thing is Internet crimes against children," Bezotte said. "There are not enough trained people in that field to deal with the issues, and that's one of my priorities. Nothing gets me fired up more than a sexual predator trying to take advantage of kids."

Bezotte said he eventually hopes to have two or three investigators in the unit.

"Technology is increasing at such a fast pace, if we don't swim, we'll sink," Shutes agreed. In the Lansing case, Shutes said, he was in a Michigan chat room, using one of his half-dozen online personas, this one a 15-year-old girl, when he was contacted by a Lansing man. Shutes said the man "engaged her in conversation, and aggressively steered toward sex," over the course of two days.

"Of course we obliged, and arrested him," Shutes said.

Michael Ballard, 29, was arraigned on charges of using a computer to commit a crime, a 20-year felony, and soliciting a minor for immoral purposes, a 10-year felony. Police confiscated four computers at his home.

The ICAC also includes officers from Sumpter Township, Michigan State University, Lansing Police, Lansing Community College and Livonia. It is funded with a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Anyone with information about computer crimes may call the team at 877-5CYBER3. (877-529-2373).

Sunday, May 21, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

HEALTH-CARE DISSENT

Doctor disagrees with DeVos Rx

When it comes to curing Michigan's health-care ills, Republican candidate Dick DeVos has the wrong prescription. That's the diagnosis of Dr. Paul Farr, a Grand Rapids gastroenterologist and president of the Michigan State Medical Society. Farr introduced DeVos at the Medical Society's leadership summit in Lansing last week. There, DeVos advanced the idea that the best solution to the health-care crisis is for more people to get jobs. Farr doesn't concur. "The model of employment being the only model of health-care insurance is really not working right now," Farr said. "All you have to do is look at Delphi, look at the percentage of employers offering health care around the United States. It's been decreasing."

City's workers receive overdue reality check

It's fair they share health care cost burden

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

Ann Arbor News editorial

Health care benefits are on the table as the city of Ann Arbor starts to renegotiate its union contracts. And City Council is considering a plan to raise the amount that non-union employees contribute to their health care benefits by \$20 per month. They now pay about \$80 monthly for families and \$20 for individuals.

This is a necessary, sure-to-be-painful step that reflects economic realities in a city often mocked for being "28 square miles surrounded by reality."

Businesses large and small, nonprofits and the self-employed all understand the growing burden of health care costs. So far, the city has paid in full for those benefits for the majority of its union workers, who comprise 85 percent of its work force of about 830 people. That amounts to about \$8,600 per employee, or about \$14.4 million in fiscal 2005-06 for its employee and retiree health care.

Those costs have been escalating at a double-digit pace for many years. In reviewing the city's budget this year, the Ann Arbor Area Chamber of Commerce cited health care costs as one of its concerns.

"We can not continue to tolerate a municipal wage and benefit structure that is dramatically out of sync with what our members provide themselves and that which is enjoyed by the majority of citizens," the chamber stated in its budget analysis.

City managers have received this message. Ann Arbor's nonunion employees started paying a portion of their monthly health care premiums in 2004. And contracts for all but one of the city's unions were set up to end in 2006, allowing the city to renegotiate agreements simultaneously for most of its union workers.

For their part, union leaders acknowledge that health care is an issue. But Jim Williams, president of AFSCME Local 369 with some 330 members, told The News he doesn't see how making employees contribute to their health care coverage will solve the "overall problem." We understand his concerns, but hope this is not an entrenched position. While sharing costs certainly won't heal the admittedly diseased health care system, it will give employees more of a stake in finding a solution. It will help ease the taxpayer's burden by addressing the city's financial concerns, and pull city workers a bit closer to the realities that the rest of us live by.

Waive late charges for drug plan

Grand Rapids Press editorial

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

There is no need for the government to play hardball with elderly and disabled citizens who missed the enrollment deadline for the new Medicare prescription-drug program. Congress and the White House should allow for sign-ups without penalty when enrollment reopens in November.

The complexity of the program, with its dizzying array of choices, confused and mystified many of those who were eligible to enroll but didn't. Slapping them with a late fee that lasts the rest of their lives would add insult to injury.

That fee, for those who missed the May 15 deadline, is in the form of higher premiums. A 1 percent penalty is slated to be added to their premiums for every month of enrollment delay. That amounts to 7 percent if they sign up during the next open enrollment in November. The late penalty ought to be waived. It hardly seems fair to penalize people for a government program that got off to such a rocky start because it was needlessly convoluted and implemented badly by federal officials.

The purpose of the deadline was to encourage large numbers of Medicare beneficiaries -- both the healthy and sick -- to sign up quickly. Spreading the risk across a larger pool of beneficiaries helps bring down premiums by ensuring that coverage isn't purchased only by people who will be heavy users. And it worked for the most part.

About 43 million Americans are Medicare eligible, but only about 17 million lacked drug coverage and needed to enroll in the Part D plan. The others already are covered through a health plan, an employer policy

or Medicaid. The Medicare Rights Center estimates that two-thirds of the 17 million needing coverage have signed up. Penalizing the other third seems unduly punitive given all the glitches that accompanied the program's rollout.

Much of the initial confusion has been eliminated, but the process of choosing a plan remains a complicated and tedious process. In Michigan and most other states, private insurers are offering 40 or more plans with differing co-payments, premiums, deductibles, drugs covered and pharmacies that can fill prescriptions. The Internet is the best tool to compare the scores of choices to find the best fit. But many of the seniors eligible for the benefit don't have the computer skills or medical savvy to decipher all the options. Giving them more penalty-free time to find the help necessary to make a good choice is not unreasonable.

Early reports show the drug program is saving money for most enrollees. A recent analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 55 percent of enrolled beneficiaries will save money; about 19 percent will spend about the same and another 19 percent will spend more. The average savings are \$1,100 per person, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. That should be sufficient incentive for those eligible to sign on at the next opportunity -- and for federal lawmakers to make it as painless as possible for them to do so.

Fired nurses claim Metron understaffed

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

By Pat Shellenbarger

The Grand Rapids Press

CASCADE TOWNSHIP -- Two nurses at a Kalamazoo nursing home owned by Cascade Township-based Metron Integrated Health Systems filed confidential complaints with the state in April, claiming the home's residents were receiving inadequate care because of understaffing. About a week later, both were fired.

Because of short staffing, residents often did not receive medications on time, licensed practical nurses were expected to perform procedures for which they were unqualified, and medical records sometimes were falsified, the nurses alleged.

When their supervisors failed to correct the problems, each filed a complaint with the state Department of Community Health, which licenses nursing homes.

"I couldn't sleep at night, and I couldn't make them change," said Judy Bush, a licensed practical nurse. "Who'd have thought it would turn around and bite us?"

Added Rashon Sites, the other fired nurse: "On second shift, it's a nightmare. There's no way to stay in compliance (with state laws), no way to get it all done, no way to take care of all those people."

Their firings came only a few weeks before Tuesday's announcement by Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox that Metron agreed to maintain staffing above the minimum levels set by state law at its nursing homes in Big Rapids, Allegan and Kalamazoo. That agreement is part of a settlement of a

lawsuit Cox filed March 8, claiming the three nursing homes committed fraud by collecting Medicaid payments while failing to meet the program's standards of care.

Eight former employees of Metron's Big Rapids nursing home face criminal charges for negligence and covering up the death of resident Sarah Comer, 50, who died in January 2005 after her oxygen tank ran empty. Cox said if Metron fails to comply with the settlement of the civil suit, he may file criminal charges.

Jim Osborn, hired as Metron's chief operating officer two months ago to help straighten the troubled chain, called Comer's death "an isolated incident," and said the company already is exceeding the staffing levels set by the out-of-court settlement.

"We're not admitting that we did a bad job," he said.

Osborn said he was unfamiliar with the allegations by the two Kalamazoo nurses, but will investigate them. He said he did not know why they were fired, although another Metron employee said they were considered to be troublemakers for filing the complaints.

Bush and Sites said Metron commonly increased staffing at its Kalamazoo home a few months before the annual state inspection, then allowed it to drop after inspectors left.

"In that three-month period, everything is good," Bush said. "After that, you're on a budget -- no money for staffing, no money for anything."

Mike Dankert, interim director of the state bureau that licenses nursing homes, said annual inspections are unannounced, but a nursing home's administrators might anticipate when inspectors are due.

"As bad as I needed that job, I need my license more," Bush said.

In her complaint to the state, Sites said a man was admitted to the home April 10 and was supposed to begin dialysis due to kidney failure. Five days after his last dialysis, no arrangements had been made for his next treatment, she alleged.

A current employee, who asked not to be identified, agreed with the two nurses understaffing is a problem, not only at the Kalamazoo home.

"The owners of all the nursing homes, they try to squeeze as much money out of each nursing home as they can," the employee said, adding that at the Kalamazoo home "they went through and bled our nursing home out. We have CNAs (certified nurse aides) and nurses that are quitting."

As part of the settlement, an independent monitor will be appointed to oversee care of residents at all nine Metron nursing homes for the next two years, Cox said. "This gives the monitor the ability to wield a very big stick," Cox said.

Metron will be required to pay \$78,015 in restitution to the Medicaid program, he said, and the company also will pay for the monitor.

"We believe Metron ought to be paying to clean up the facilities, not the taxpayers," Cox said. The agreement, he said, "hopefully will serve as a beacon, raising the bar for all nursing homes. The goal is to make certain no other patient suffers the fate of Sarah Comer."

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This Week APHA in Washington

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House Passes FY 2007 Budget Resolution

On May 18, the House passed its \$2.8 trillion fiscal year 2007 budget resolution (H. Con. Res. 376) by a vote of 218-210. The resolution was amended several times after its introduction to address the concerns of moderate Republicans over the reductions in domestic discretionary funding that were proposed in the administration's FY 2007 budget. Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.), chair of the Appropriations Committee, agreed to move \$4 billion from Defense into the Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education account so that programs under that account would be frozen at their current level rather than reduced as originally proposed. In addition, language was added to the resolution before the floor vote yesterday, stating that if \$3.1 billion in funding was found from reductions in mandatory programs at a later date, that amount would be added to the Labor-HHS-Education account. The resolution also includes a "Sense of the House" calling on Congress to reject the president's budget that eliminated or cut health, social services, education, and job training programs. Both the Social Services Block Grant and the Community Services Block Grant had been targeted for reductions under the original draft resolution. In addition, the resolution includes reconciliation instructions for eight committees to find a total of \$6.8 billion in savings over five years in mandatory programs and report those savings to the Budget Committee by June 9, 2006.

Congress Considers Part D Legislation

May 15 marked the initial enrollment deadline for the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit, and key leaders in Congress and the administration are beginning to assess the new program. On May 16, Senate Finance Committee Chair Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) and Ranking Member Max Baucus (D-Mont.) introduced bipartisan legislation that would waive the late penalty for beneficiaries who enroll in a drug plan during the next open enrollment period, which begins in mid-November. The bill, titled the Medicare Late Enrollment Assistance Act, would also authorize \$18 million for outreach efforts to help beneficiaries in understanding the benefit and preparing them to enroll this fall. Grassley believes that there is broad support for the legislation and that it will move quickly through the Senate. The bill was co-sponsored by Sens. Mike DeWine (R-Ohio), Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), Rick Santorum (R-Pa.), and

Olympia Snowe (R-Maine). In the House, Rep. Nancy L. Johnson (R-Conn.), chair of the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, was expected to introduce legislation that would waive the late penalty for beneficiaries signing up later this year. Meanwhile, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt and McClellan estimated that more than 38 million of the 43 million Medicare beneficiaries had drug coverage. Leavitt and McClellan did not take a position on the bipartisan penalty waiver legislation, indicating that there might be some concerns with the offset used in the Senate bill; the offset would redirect funds from the so-called stabilization fund for managed care plans. The press release for Grassley's bill is available at http://grassley.senate.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease_id=5063.

House Committee Approves Older Americans Act Reauthorization

On May 17, the full House Education and the Workforce Committee approved a bill, the Senior Independence Act (H.R. 5293), that would reauthorize programs under the Older Americans Act. The measure had been approved by the panel's Subcommittee on Select Education on May 10 (see This Week, May 12). The committee adopted a number of amendments, including a substitute amendment by Chairman Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-Calif.) that would acknowledge the need for seniors to access mental health screening and receive referrals for treatment. Other amendments included support for benefit enrollment and outreach; encouragement for meal providers to provide information on getting flu shots to those who are homebound; authority for the Administration on Aging to prevent, detect, and treat elder abuse; and exclusion of veterans' benefits and certain other benefits as income in determining eligibility for assistance under the bill. The committee defeated several other amendments, including one that would have raised the minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour for seniors in community service jobs. More information is available on the committee's web site, <http://edworkforce.house.gov>

House Panel Discusses Long-Term Care Planning

On May 17, the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee held a hearing to discuss planning for long-term care. Committee Chair Rep. Nathan Deal (R-Ga.) indicated that he would introduce legislation to create state demonstration projects to help individuals who use the equity in their home to help pay for their long-term care. This would allow these individuals to retain a greater amount of their assets and still apply for Medicaid. Ranking Member Rep. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) said Congress treats the elderly like guinea pigs when it comes to Medicare drug coverage and like criminals with regard to Medicaid. Testimony from Karen Ignani, president of America's Health Insurance Plans, included a series of steps for Congress to take to help make long-term care insurance more affordable, including certain tax deductions. Information from the hearing can be found at <http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/05172006hearing1900/hearing.htm>.

Child Care Administrators Release Report on State Quality Initiatives

On May 15, the National Association of State Child Care Administrators, an affiliate of the American Public Human Services Association, and Child Trends released a report, Investing in Quality: a Survey of State Child Care and Development Fund Initiatives. The report details the results of a survey describing how states are using funding from the Child Care and Development Fund, along with other sources, to invest in child care quality. The survey, which was conducted in collaboration with the Bank Street College of Education, collected data on quality objectives, target populations, funding sources and amounts, and data collection efforts for each quality-improvement initiative in responding states. The study found that states have focused on achieving a relatively small set of quality objectives that research indicates have the potential to improve child care quality, focusing particularly on improving health and safety in child care settings and strengthening the professional development of the early childhood workforce. The report is available at www.aphsa.org.

FNS Addresses Medicaid Citizenship Verification Impact on Food Stamp Program

On May 12, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) issued a letter addressing the impact on the Food

Stamp Program (FSP) of the Medicaid citizenship documentation requirement that goes into effect July 1, 2006. The requirement, passed earlier this year as part of the Deficit Reduction Act, mandates that applicants for Medicaid provide evidence of citizenship. The FNS letter specifies that in general the Medicaid mandate has no effect on eligibility for the FSP. If a client fails to provide the necessary citizenship documentation for Medicaid, that does not make the client's American citizenship questionable for food stamps. In addition, if Medicaid learns that the client is a non-citizen during the process of obtaining documentary evidence of citizenship, that fact alone does not necessarily affect FSP eligibility. However, the FSP caseworker in that event would have to follow standard FSP procedures for evaluating the applicant's alien status to ensure the person falls within the rules that allow most, but not all, legal non-citizens to participate in the FSP.

Forum Presents Latest State Health Care Initiatives

On May 18, the National Health Policy Forum had a briefing to promote the publication, *Medicaid in 2006: A Trip Down the Yellow Brick Road?* Beth Waldman, state Medicaid director for Massachusetts, provided an overview of the Massachusetts health care reform initiative, Massachusetts Health Care Reform. The state's effort partly involves utilizing a Section 1115 waiver to provide private insurance to the uninsured. The initiative will be implemented July 1, 2007. Thomas Arnold, state Medicaid director for Florida, provided an update on Florida's Medicaid reform plan. Florida's plan will be implemented in Duval and Broward counties on July 1, 2006. Next year, Florida intends to phase in and integrate the Florida Senior Care Program long-term care into its reform plan. Other speakers at the event included Barbara Edwards of Health Management Associates, formerly the Medicaid director in Ohio; Cindy Mann of the Georgetown University Health Policy Institute; and Kathryn Allen of the Government Accountability Office. The report can be found online at http://www.nhpf.org/pdfs_ib/IB810_Medicaid2006_03-29-06.pdf.

Medicaid Medical Directors Meet in Baltimore

On May 11 and 12, the state Medicaid medical directors convened a two-day workshop in Baltimore to discuss medical necessity and the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment program. The workshop is in its second year of existence and is part of the Medicaid medical directors' learning network. The event is sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

ACF Requests Comments on Chafee Data Collection

On May 18, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued a notice for comments on data collection plans for the evaluation of five independent living programs funded under the Chafee Foster Care Independence program. These programs are being evaluated based on the mandate in the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act to evaluate promising programs administered by state and local child welfare agencies. The evaluations consist of interviews, observations, and focus groups with program administrators, staff, and youth aged 14 to 21 who are receiving services. Respondents to this request for comments are expected to be youth, caseworkers, program administrators, and staff. Comments are due within 60 days. The notice was published in the May 18 Federal Register (71 FR 28869-28870) and is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

FNS Publishes Racial/Ethnic Data Collection Rule

On May 18, FNS published a final rule that implements the revised collection and reporting of racial and ethnic data by states on persons receiving benefits from the FSP. The changes comply with new racial/ethnic data collection standards issued by the Office of Management and Budget. The rule was proposed in November 2002. It is effective June 19, 2006, and states may implement the provisions any time after June 19, 2006, but no later than April 1, 2007. The rule was published in the May 18 Federal Register (71 FR 28759-28763), and is available at <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/06-4662.htm>.